

SILIUS ITALICUS ON THE BATTLE OF CANNAE:  
A COMMENTARY ON *PUNICA* 10\*

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“Cannae! The name resonates across the centuries with the defeat of a nation mired in unshakeable faith in her invincibility.” Thus begins the preface of this commentary by R. Joy Littlewood, who then proceeds with an interesting modern anecdote about the name “Cannae”. This name was selected as the title of a number of articles published by a German general in 1913 on his plan to defeat France by encircling its armies in the manner of Hannibal in Apulia before Russia had the opportunity to respond by attacking Germany from the east (p. vii). Littlewood herself, an independent scholar in Oxford, has established a reputation over the past dozen years as an expert commentator on Ovid and especially Silius Italicus, with commentaries on *Fasti* 6,<sup>1</sup> *Punica* 7<sup>2</sup> and (now) *Punica* 10, the latter which deals with the last stage of the battle of Cannae.

1. CRITICAL BACKGROUND

Silius’ *Punica* was held in high regard by scholars from the Renaissance to the Victorian Age, with the epicist even considered to be equal or superior to other Roman poets from Vergil to his Flavian colleagues Statius and Valerius Flaccus. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, Silius was generally criticized (or even ignored) by scholars and commentators who sometimes cited Pliny’s criticism of his lack of talent (*Ep.* 3.7.5) without actually producing textual evidence of his alleged shortcomings as a poet.<sup>3</sup> A gradual though perceptible shift in sentiment toward the *Punica* became

\* R. Joy Littlewood (ed., trans.), *A Commentary on Silius Italicus’ Punica 10: Edited with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2017, lxxix+265 pp., £75.00, ISBN 978-0-19-871381-4.

<sup>1</sup> R. J. Littlewood (ed.), *A Commentary on Ovid’s Fasti Book 6*, Oxford 2006.

<sup>2</sup> R. J. Littlewood (ed.), *A Commentary on Silius Italicus’ Punica 7*, Oxford 2011.

<sup>3</sup> W. J. Dominik, “The Reception of Silius Italicus in Modern Scholarship”, in A. Augoustakis (ed.), *Brill’s Companion to Silius Italicus*, Leiden-Boston 2010, 431-40.

apparent from about the middle of the twentieth century,<sup>4</sup> though prejudice still lingers and even some prominent modern scholars have treated Silius shabbily based upon their own critical biases.<sup>5</sup> On the whole, however, there is today far greater appreciation of the literary qualities of the *Punica* than at any time in the past couple of centuries. A consequence of this positive shift in scholarly sentiment toward Silius is that an increasing number of scholars such as Littlewood have undertaken commentaries on the *Punica*, so much so that now there remain only a half dozen books that have not yet been commented upon.<sup>6</sup>

Given the changing perceptions of Silius Italicus over the past few decades and his emergence from the “worst excesses of the rhetorical demolition”<sup>7</sup> of his poetic craftsmanship, any book or discussion of Silius invites a number of questions regarding the critic’s treatment, a couple of which are: What is the critic’s attitude toward Silius? Does the scholar treat the *Punica* on its own merits or does it remain mired in the criticism of the past regarding its alleged poetic inferiority? In the case of Littlewood, scholars of Silius were afforded a positive view of Silius’ qualities as a poet in her invaluable commentary on *Punica* 7. At the same time Littlewood was working on her commentary on *Punica* 10, she was publishing a number of chapters in volumes that attest to her understanding of the themes and literary qualities of the *Punica* in a way that values Silius’ sophistication and unique contribution to mytho-historical epic.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. OVERVIEW

*Punica* 10 is particularly important since it is the last book of the central scene of the epic, the Cannae narrative, which begins in book 8. The tenth book features a description of the events that comprise the last part of the battle of Cannae (whose narration commences at 9.278): the *aristeia* and death of Paulus (10.1-325); the intervention of Juno, who bids the god Sleep to send a dream to the victorious Hannibal to forestall him from marching

<sup>4</sup> Dominik, “The Reception of Silius Italicus”, 425-6, 442, 446.

<sup>5</sup> Dominik, “The Reception of Silius Italicus”, 435-37.

<sup>6</sup> As of the beginning of 2019, commentaries or part-commentaries have appeared or are in preparation on *Punica* 1-3, 6-10 and 13-15 (excluding Spaltenstein’s two-volume commentary on the entire epic).

<sup>7</sup> The phrase is that of Dominik, “The Reception of Silius Italicus”, 437.

<sup>8</sup> R. J. Littlewood, “Patterns of Darkness: Chthonic Illusion, Gigantomachy, and Sacrificial Ritual in the *Punica*”, in A. Augoustakis (ed.), *Religion and Ritual in Flavian Epic*, Oxford 2013, 199-215; “Loyalty and the Lyre: Constructions of *Fides* in Hannibal’s Capuan Banquets”, in A. Augoustakis (ed.), *Flavian Poetry and Its Greek Past*, Leiden 2014, 267-85; “Dynastic Triads: Flavian Resonances and Structural Antithesis in Silius’ Sons of Hamilcar”, in N. Maniotti (ed.), *Family in Flavian Epic*, Leiden 2016, 209-27; “Significant Conjunctions of Civil War and Roman Cult from Ovid’s *Fasti* to a Flavian Metamorphosis of Horace’s 16th *Epode*”, *XIV A.D. Saeculum Augustum (Lisbon 24-26th September, 2014)*, forthcoming.

on Rome (326-86); the rallying of the remnants of the Roman army at Canusium and Scipio's thwarting of their scheme to flee Italy (387-448); the surveying of the battlefield by Hannibal and the discovery and burial of the body of Paulus (449-577); and anxiety at Rome, Fabius' quelling of popular anger against Varro, and his organization of a Rome's defences (578-658). Littlewood's Introduction to the *Punica* (pp. xii-lxxix) and Commentary on book 10 (pp. 46-246) allude to the *makrostruktur* of the *Punica* and stress the central position and role of the Cannae narrative within the overall structure of the epic (pp. liii-lix, 89). Although there is no general discussion in the Introduction of what Littlewood believes to be the central themes of the *Punica*, these can be construed to a certain extent from the various references to the thematic concerns of book 10 throughout the Commentary (e.g., vv. 47, 49, 93, 123, 134, 222), which is useful given that most readers will consult it selectively instead of read it cover to cover.

Book 10 includes passages featuring leonine/tigrine (e.g., vv. 18-24, 124-7, 241-6, 293-7) and shipwreck (321-5, 608-12) similes as well as the Roman legend of Cloelia exemplifying Roman bravery and intolerance of foreign tyrants (476-502, esp. 492-501). Instead of just citing the similes of Cannae, Littlewood not only provides a brief overview of their usage in the *Punica* (pp. lxvii-lxix) and sometimes explains their specific function in the passages within which they occur in the Commentary (e.g., pp. 85, 113-14, 128, 164), but she also discusses their broader thematic implications, including when the similes suggest intertextual and intratextual significance (e.g., pp. 56-7, 74, 84-5, 93). Littlewood's exegetical approach to the treatment of similes is replicated in her discussions of metre and prosody (pp. lxix-lxxii) in the Introduction and at various points throughout the Commentary, where she not only discusses the various metrical patterns used by Silius but also cites the specific effects of their use (pp. lxix-lxxii, 48, 60, 79, 84, 106, 108-11, 124, 153-5, 188-9, 234).

In addition to her Introduction and Commentary, Littlewood prints the text/apparatus and translation of *Punica* 10 on facing pages (pp. 2-45). She omits a Further Reading section, which she had included in her commentary on *Punica* 7,<sup>9</sup> perhaps because she would have listed many of the same bibliographical items. A Select Bibliography (pp. 247-58), an Index Verborum (pp. 259-60) and a General Index (p. 261-5) round out the volume. In addition to the few missing items, misspellings and miscitations in the *sigla* (pp. lxxviii-lxxix) mentioned below,<sup>10</sup> there are a few typographical errors (e.g., *permit* for *premit*, p. 173); in addition, in a few cases the *lemma* cited differs from the printed text (cf., e.g., text of part-line 529, p. 36: *sonat acta bipenni*; *lemma* of v. 529, p. 208: *sonat icta bipenni*).

<sup>9</sup> Littlewood, *Punica* 7, 265-7.

<sup>10</sup> See below, "3. Textual Issues".

## 3. TEXTUAL ISSUES

Naturally one of the most important questions in assessing the value and utility of a commentary concerns the discussion of the Latin text (printed on even pages 2–44). Does the scholar rely on recent textual criticism, for example, yet offer some alternative readings based upon her or his own reading of the text and insight into the epic? Littlewood commences with a discussion of the transmission and reception of the *Punica* (pp. lxxiii–lxxv) that follows upon her longer treatment of the same topic in her commentary on *Punica* 7.<sup>11</sup> As in Littlewood's earlier commentary,<sup>12</sup> the Introduction to her commentary on *Punica* 10 concludes with the *sigla* used in the *apparatus criticus* (pp. lxxvi–lxxix), which is based upon the *apparatus criticus* of Josef Delz.<sup>13</sup> The section on the *sigla* includes not only the *stemma*, *codices* and ancient editions but also modern works cited by Delz;<sup>14</sup> however, a comparison between Littlewood and Delz shows some missing items (e.g., W. S. Watt, "Notes on Latin Epic Poetry", *BICS* 31 [1984], 153–60), misspellings (e.g., Håkansson instead of Håkanson) and miscitations (e.g., W. C. Summers, "Notes on Silius Italicus, V–VIII", *CR* 14 [1900] 48–50 instead of "Notes on Silius Italicus, IX–XVII", *CR* 14 [1900] 305–9).

Littlewood engages with not only the text and *apparatus criticus* of Delz in her Introduction and Commentary (e.g., pp. lxxiii, 82, 95, 114, 142, 165, 177, 229) but also the discussions of other textual critics such as Spaltenstein (pp. 47–8, 52, 76, 84, 100, 151, 168–9, 228), Summers (pp. 95, 177), Shackleton-Bailey (p. 177), Bentley (p. 190), Ruperti (pp. 82, 84, 206) and Drakenborch (p. 157). The text itself of *Punica* 10 presents some problematic issues, notably in a few places where the text seems particularly corrupt (vv. 112–13, 175, 609). Like any textual critic, Littlewood tries to make sense of these instances of textual corruption, but in the process of lemmatizing these lines she misrepresents Delz's *apparatus criticus* not only by omitting the required *crucēs* (e.g., v. 175) and *lacuna* (cf. vv. 112–13) but also by using asterisks instead of *crucēs* (v. 609).

In a notable departure from the usual structure of the *apparatus criticus* that appears at the bottom of the Latin text, Littlewood connects each *lemma* with the printed text not through a reference to the line number but rather a footnote number, which seems an unnecessary innovation since locating the relevant text through the line number is easier than searching for a footnote. In addition, there is an initial tendency for the Latin scholar who is checking the apparatus to confuse a footnote number for a line number.

<sup>11</sup> Littlewood, *Punica* 7, xci–xcvi.

<sup>12</sup> Littlewood, *Punica* 7, xcvi–xcix.

<sup>13</sup> J. Delz (ed.), *Sili Italici Punica*, Berlin 1987.

<sup>14</sup> Delz, *Punica*, lxxvi–lxxix passim.

## 4. TRANSLATION

In an improvement over the traditional commentary Littlewood provides a complete English prose translation of *Punica* 10, with each page of translation facing each page of the Latin text (pp. 3–45), whereas in her earlier commentary on *Punica* 7 she had furnished only translations of some of the *lemmata*. In this regard, Littlewood continues the admirable tradition that has recently been established for the Oxford commentary on Flavian epic. For the reader with little or no Latin making use of Littlewood's translation, which seems (at least in some places) to depend upon Duff's Loeb translation (e.g., 67, 643–4),<sup>15</sup> her choice of opting for prose rather than verse is likely to cause confusion for two reasons: first, the lack of a line-for-line translation will make it difficult to match the English translation with the Latin text; secondly, much of the prose translation does not correspond to the Latin text on the facing pages. For example, the first four lines of the English translation on page 5 apply to the last four lines of Latin text on page 2; the last six lines of Latin text on page 6 are translated in the first five lines of page 9; the last two plus lines of the translation on page 9 apply to the first two lines of Latin text on page 10; and the translation of the first eleven lines of Latin text on page 12 is rendered in the last nine lines of page 11. This lack of correspondence between the Latin text and English translation on facing pages is not because there is a lack of space on pages that contain the English translation or because there is an attempt to avoid splitting up passages of the English translation in mid-sentence for the sake of cohesive readability; passages of English translation are divided in mid-sentence, in fact, between pages 11/13, 27/29, 31/33 and 33/35. Whether or not this lack of correspondence between the text and translation is the fault of the press or Littlewood is difficult to know. The issue should have been flagged at the proofing stage—and perhaps it was.

While Littlewood's use of the prose form for her translation of *Punica* 10 is, of course, a personal choice, the most suitable form for the translation of the Latin verse is verse, ideally a verse-form that suggests something of the syntactic and metrical qualities of Silius Italicus' hexameter. Since English is more monosyllabic than Latin, what is required for the English translation is a verse-form that demands slightly fewer syllables per line than the Latin hexameter but with the same number of stresses. The most suitable verse-form for the translation of the Latin hexameter line, with its thirteen to seventeen syllables and six metrical ictuses, is an English verse line of eleven to fifteen syllables and (wherever possible) six stresses.<sup>16</sup> The advantage

<sup>15</sup> J. D. Duff (ed., trans.), *Silius Italicus: Punica*, vols. 1–2, Cambridge, Mass. 1934.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. W. J. Dominik, Review of A. D. Melville (trans.), *Statius, Thebaid, with Introduction and Notes* by D. W. T. Vessey, Oxford 1992, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 4.3, 1993, 187–92, esp. 190.

of this line-for-line translation for the student who is trying to read and understand an epic work such as the *Punica* is obvious. Perhaps scholars have tended toward English prose translations of Latin verse text either because they have not felt sufficiently equipped to produce verse translations, because all translations of verse in the Oxford series have been prose, or because they did not think that Latin verse necessarily warranted an English verse translation—or some combination of the aforementioned.

##### 5. INTRODUCTION TO COMMENTARY

The 26,000-word Introduction (pp. xii-lxxix) situates both Silius and the *Punica* within the social and literary contexts of the Flavian age and explains the epic's treatment of its historical subject matter. There are sections on Silius as a politician and poet (pp. xii-xvi), which complements Littlewood's discussion of Silius' public life and literary career in her commentary on *Punica* 7;<sup>17</sup> Silius' adaptation of Livy in *Punica* 10 (pp. xvi-xxiv); the Roman heroes of the battle of Cannae and its aftermath, namely Lucius Aemilius Paulus, Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus, Quintus Fabius Maximus Verrucosus and Hannibal (pp. xxiv-xl); Silius' exemplary epilogue (*haec tum Roma fuit. post te cui uertere mores / si stabat fatis, potius, Carthago, maneres*, 657-8) on empire, *luxus* and civil war (pp. xlvi-liii); Silius' epic style, which includes sections on the structure of *Punica* 10, language and style, epic rhetoric and Flavian style, and the similes of Cannae (pp. liii-lxix); metre and prosody in *Punica* 10 (pp. lxix-lxxii); and the transmission and reception of the text, including *sigla* (pp. lxxiii-lxxix).

Littlewood's discussions of Silius, Livy, and his style in the Introduction partly—and unavoidably—iterate those in the Introduction of her commentary on *Punica* 7, with the important difference that she makes them specifically relevant to her treatment of *Punica* 10. In the first part of the Introduction, Littlewood makes the case, as she did in her earlier commentary on *Punica* 7, for treating Silius as a politically engaged figure, for example, not only through his involvement as an observer in the negotiations between Vespasian's representatives and the Vitellians but also his service as proconsul of Asia (cf. pp. xv-xvi). Littlewood accepts the traditional view of Trajan as an emperor known for his civility and magnanimity and worthy of the title *optimus princeps* (p. xvi; cf. *Ep.* 3.7). Situations in Pliny's *Epistles* and *Panegyricus* are seldom as simple as they appear, however, as Pliny himself suggests when he points out that his *laudes* of Trajan should not be construed to mean exactly the opposite of their literal meaning (*Pan.* 3.4, 4.1; cf. *Ep.* 3.18.7). When Pliny urges that his own praise of Trajan's qualities and deeds are to be read literally rather than ironically in contrast to previous

<sup>17</sup> Littlewood, *Punica* 7, xv-xix.



imperial panegyric, he at least invites the reader to question the sincerity of his own flattery of Trajan.

#### 6. TREATMENT OF THEMES

One of the drawbacks of the traditional commentary, including some in the Oxford Classical Monographs series, is that in its focus upon individual words, phrases, lines and passages, it has tended to advance textual, philological and metrical issues at the expense of literary ones. The result sometimes means that the reader gains little sense of how individual scenes, books or poems fit into the overall structure and themes of the individual book, work, and corpus of the poet. But the Oxford commentaries on Flavian epic, all of which have been produced since the turn of the century, have tended to focus on literary issues.

Indeed, one of the special qualities of Littlewood's commentary on *Punica* 10 is her deep understanding of the rich tapestry of themes, allusions, imagery, diction and other poetic qualities of the narrative. As in her commentary on *Punica* 7, Littlewood manages to discuss important thematic issues without unduly sacrificing the textual and philological subjects of a traditional commentary. Littlewood's literary awareness and appreciation is not only evident in the Introduction but in the actual Commentary itself. Instead of discussing textual, philological and metrical issues purely for their own sake, Littlewood expands her focus whenever possible to show how these issues enhance a particular theme or establish a certain pattern that informs the narrative or literary context. The result of Littlewood's approach is that her commentary on *Punica* 10 serves both to elucidate the themes of the *Punica* as well as to explain the significance of individual words, lines and passages. This means that the commentary will serve students who wish to understand the *Punica's* themes and literary qualities as well as those who consult the commentary to understand a particular section.

#### 7. IDEOLOGICAL POSITIONING

In any commentary or book on the *Punica*, an important issue involves the ideological positioning of the critic. Does Littlewood herself treat the epic as celebratory of Roman values or does she believe that there is an inherent ambiguity in terms of the poet's treatment of the themes of the epic and in his political signification of the Roman nation? While a small number of critics have focussed attention of aspects of the work that undermine Rome's presentation as a positive moral force,<sup>18</sup> others continue to argue for the traditional view that the *Punica* ultimately celebrates Rome's achievement and values in its defeat of Carthage.<sup>19</sup> Littlewood's positive view of Trajan's

<sup>18</sup> Dominik, "The Reception of Silius Italicus", 444.

<sup>19</sup> Dominik, "The Reception of Silius Italicus", 444-5.

reign extends to her unambiguous reading of *Punica* 10 and various figures such as Fabius Maximus and Scipio Africanus, whose representations in the *Punica* are at least slightly more nuanced than they appear to be on the surface. The *Punica* as a whole is an ambiguous text and its narrative and characters challenge Rome's public image as a divinely sanctioned moral power.<sup>20</sup> Littlewood attributes to Fabius Maximus the character of "a senior statesman, *expers irarum*, possessed of moral strength, *sacra seni uis*, and the wisdom to perceive the right course of action, *sollertia ueri*, according to Roman Stoic ethics" (p. xv). But Fabius is unable to contain his resentment against Carthage and displays a manifest eagerness for war after the Roman envoys' belligerent demands to the Carthaginian senate to withdraw from Saguntum are rejected (2.380, esp. 387-9), which slightly undercuts Littlewood's representation of him as *expers irarum* and a Stoic figure.

More problematic is Littlewood's reading of Scipio, who is said to combine "the élan and *uirtus* of an epic hero with inviolable *fides* towards the Roman state and her institutions, simultaneously avoiding overstepping the boundaries of military ambition" (p. xxxvi). Although Scipio metamorphoses into a proto-typical Roman hero in the *Punica*, he is an ambiguous figure since he associated with a number of negative or tainted images such as the *sceptrum* (e.g., 17.627; cf. 13.601-12, esp. 605; 14.33-34, 85-98, esp. 33, 86), thunderbolt (15.403-5, esp. 404-5; 16.143-45; cf. 7.106-7) and serpent (16.13.637-44, esp. 642-4; cf. 2.283-87; 13.645-6, 15.139-45) suggestive of the unfavourable exercise of power; exhibits reckless conduct in battle (cf. 4.217-47, esp. 217, 231; 4.622-37); displays self-aggrandizement and blind ambition in his desire to lead the Roman forces into Africa (cf. 16.663-69, esp. 668; cf. 17.625-6), traits that have a distinctly Lucanian reminiscence (cf. Luc. 1.87-9); is recalled when another Scipio is named among a number of soldiers who recall Rome's future civil wars (e.g., Sil. 8.546); and is associated with Jupiter (cf. 17.653-4) and strongman figures such as Caesar (cf. 13.862-4).<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Littlewood might well be justified in asserting that "Silius seems to hint sardonically that the senate fears that Scipio might abuse the power entrusted to him" (p. xxxvii, n. 147), though the passage actually cited to support this suggestion (16.698-700) appears to be erroneous.

<sup>20</sup> See also the various discussions of the *Punica*'s ambiguity in W. J. Dominik, "Civil War, Parricide, and the Sword in Silius Italicus's *Punica*", in L. D. Ginsberg and D. Krasne (eds.), *After 69 CE: Writing Civil War in Flavian Rome*, Berlin/Boston 2018, 271-93, esp. 287-90; "Rome Then and Now: Linking Together the Saguntum and Cannae Episodes in Silius Italicus' *Punica*", in H.-J. van Dam, R. Nauta and H. Smolenaars (eds.), *Flavian Poetry*, Leiden/Boston 2006, 113-27, esp. 119; and "Hannibal at the Gates: Programmatizing Rome and Romanitas in Silius Italicus, *Punica* 1 and 2", in A. J. Boyle and W. J. Dominik (eds.), *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text*, Leiden/Boston 2003, 469-97, esp. 488-9.

<sup>21</sup> For a more detailed discussion see Dominik, "Civil War in Silius Italicus's *Punica*", 271-3.



## 8. INTERTEXTUALITY AND NAMES

Littlewood is particularly adept in her treatment of intertextual (and intratextual) references in the *Punica*. In the Introduction of her earlier commentary on *Punica* 7, Littlewood discusses the numerous historical sources and literary models of Silius, so in the Introduction of this commentary on *Punica* 10 she focuses mainly on Silius' use of Livy in his account of Cannae *Punica* 10. In the Introduction and actual Commentary Littlewood does not simply mention the sources and cite intertextual and intratextual references (or sources), which has long been the practice of commentators, but consistent with more recent practice of commentators on Neronian and Flavian epic in the Oxford series, she actually endeavours wherever possible to explain the function and relevance of them in the narrative and the epic as a whole.

A single example of Littlewood's proficient technique in dealing with issues of intertextuality is her discussion of *Punica* 10.382-3 (pp. 164-5; cf. pp. xxiii-xxiv, 143, 159, 161) in which she notes the transference of the jibe made to Hannibal by Maharbal in Livy (22.51.1-4) to Mago in Silius that the Carthaginian leader may know how to win a battle but not how to capitalize on victory. In addition to this intertextual observation, Littlewood also notes *ibidem* the intertextual allusion of the first two words of Mago's comment that only Varro, not Rome, has been conquered ("*tanta mole*" inquit "*non Roma, ut credidit ipsa, / sed Varro est uictus*") to Vergil (*tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem*, *Aen.* 1.33) and Valerius Flaccus (*tantamque operis consurgere molem*, *Arg.* 1.499) and suggests that the labour required to create the Roman race will need to be exceeded in order to destroy Rome.

Another area in which Littlewood demonstrates her literary sensitivity is in her frequent discussions of the import of the names of various figures mentioned in the *Punica* (pp. xxix-xxx, li-lii, lx, lxxii, lxxiv, 47, 59-60, 65, 70-71, 87-91, 95, 97, 103, 105, 108, 111, 114-15, 127-8, 130-1, 171-2, 179, 195, 206, 212), most notably in her analysis of word play on the name Paulus (pp. xxix n. 104, 47, 127, 130-1, 206).

## 9. COMMENTARY

Overall the actual Commentary (pp. 46-246) of 82,000 words is commendable for its lucidity, organization and utility. Littlewood provides the context for her discussion of *lemmata* by not only including summaries of sections of the Latin text but also translations of many of the lines. The Commentary is expertly organized. Each section and subsection has a title, which is sometimes followed by an up-to-date bibliography of relevant sources. Often mini-essays introduce the sections and sub-sections explaining the background and context of passages; these introductions are then followed by summaries of the passages. The actual notes usually follow a regular pattern: the *lemma*, which is usually part or whole of one or two verses, sometimes up to four lines; (frequently) an English translation of the *lemma* (not just

for problematic phrases and words), which resembles but does not merely repeat the translation facing each page of the Latin text; an explanation of the basic meaning of the passage; stylistic remarks on, for example, word order, repetition and sound effects; some comments on the relevant historical sources and events, most often from Livy and Polybius; explanations of the significance of important cultural references; and discussions of such literary topics as the character of major figures in the narrative and the significance of various intertextual and intratextual allusions.

Given that Littlewood provides a complete translation of the *Punica* on the pages facing the Latin text, her practice of frequently providing translations of individual *lemmata* may seem unnecessary; however, the additional translations will make the commentary especially useful for the growing number of readers with little or no Latin who may be consulting it more for literary and historical issues than for philological and stylistic matters. In what seems to be an attempt to avoid repetition in her commentary, Littlewood provides a second translation of the *lemma* that resembles but does not merely repeat the translation facing each page of the Latin text. A randomly selected example is her translation of lines 335-6 (*ac iam claustra manu, iam moenia flamma/occupat et iungit Tarpeia incendia Cannis*): In the translation at the front of the volume (on the page facing the Latin text), Littlewood renders these lines as “He was already gripping the gates of Rome and setting fire to her walls as he crowned victory at Cannae with the conflagration of Jupiter’s Tarpeian temple” (p. 25), while in her Commentary she translates these verses as “And already he grips the gates in his hand, [sic] already he attacks the walls with firebrands and adds to Cannae Jupiter’s temple in flames” (p. 142). In this case it seems that the English translation of the *lemma* in the Commentary is more literal since *inter alia* it omits “Rome”, which does not actually appear in the Latin text. This practice of translating the text twice has the potential to cause confusion, especially among students with little Latin who might wonder which of the two translations is more “correct”. It also raises the question of which version a person should cite, for instance, when using Littlewood’s translation in an essay or article. The practice actually illustrates her considerable skill as a translator of Latin verse into English prose, though there is a relatively small number of contentious interpretations of Silius’ text that are reflected in her translations (e.g., vv. 178-80, 240, 643-4), most notably in the discrimination between the Roman and Carthaginian armies (vv. 31-2, 190-2).

The exegetical notes constitute a particularly strong feature of the commentary. Always detailed in nature, they tend toward an analysis of literary and historical rather than textual and philological issues. Textual parallels are sometimes cited and, as noted above,<sup>22</sup> Littlewood’s discussion of

<sup>22</sup> See above, “8. Intertextuality and Names”.

intertextual issues is illuminating. Littlewood's focus upon literary rather than philological issues may be due to partly personal preference, but it may also be due to the fact that the short commentary of Spaltenstein on *Punica* 10<sup>23</sup> left much to be commented upon in terms of literary and historical matters, whereas Delz had already dealt proficiently with the textual issues of the same book in his *apparatus criticus*.<sup>24</sup> As surmised in my review of Littlewood's commentary on *Punica* 7,<sup>25</sup> Littlewood's sophisticated discussions of Silius' historical sources and intertextual allusions are made possible partly by the nature of the source material itself, though, as suggested above in the discussion of Fabius Maximus and Scipio Africanus,<sup>26</sup> the text of the *Punica* is more ambiguous than first meets the eye. Littlewood's inclusion of diagrams (pp. xix, 46, 117) and a map (p. 167) aids in the clarification of her discussions of the different phases of the battle of Cannae. As with her commentary on *Punica* 7, Littlewood's commentary on *Punica* 10 has much of the feel of an interpretive essay rather than a traditional commentary, which is partly due to the expansive writing style utilized in the Introduction and in the notes. In fact, if Littlewood had so desired, she could have written a monograph on the Cannae episode of *Punica* 8-10 that incorporated much of her learned discussions of the narrative, characters and themes of *Punica* 10, but her commentary is no less useful for its illuminating treatment of the literary and historical aspects of the text.

One slight detraction from Littlewood's insightful critical discussions on *Punica* 10 is her occasional attribution of intention (but to a lesser extent than in her commentary on *Punica* 7) to Silius or his characters (p. lxxv, 84, 119-20, 148, 237), since poetic intention is impossible to establish with certainty even when (or especially when) the poet tells us.<sup>27</sup> Littlewood's use of narratological terminology (pp. xliii, lvi, lxii, 65, 107, 165, 168) seems unnecessary since there is no narratological theory involved in her critical assessment of the *Punica*, though admittedly the use of such terminology is becoming increasingly common in critical discussions of classical literature. Unlike her earlier commentary on *Punica* 7, Littlewood inserts the article "the" before the title *Punica* throughout, which may please some more traditionally minded scholars.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> F. Spaltenstein (ed.), *Commentaire des Punica de Silius Italicus, 9-17*, Geneva 1990, 55-102.

<sup>24</sup> Delz, *Punica*, 247-72.

<sup>25</sup> W. J. Dominik, Review of R. J. Littlewood, *A Commentary on Silius Italicus' Punica* 7, Oxford 2011, *Latomus* 73.4, 2014, 1124.

<sup>26</sup> See above, "7. Ideological Positioning".

<sup>27</sup> See further Dominik, Review of Littlewood, *A Commentary on Silius Italicus' Punica* 7, 1124.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. D. C. Feeney, Review of A. J. Boyle (ed.), *The Imperial Muse: Flavian Epicist to Claudian*, Bantleigh, Vic. 1990, *The Classical Review* 42.2, 1992, 324, who restores the article "the" that (in his view) W. J. Dominik "so maddeningly omits throughout" (in his chapter "Monarchal Power and Imperial Politics in Statius' *Thebaid*", 74-97).

## 10. CONCLUSION

Littlewood's commentary on *Punica* 10 is commendably accessible to postgraduate and even undergraduate students of Latin and Classical Studies, but it will find many appreciative readers among scholars of Silius Italicus. In addition to providing mini-essays and notes involving literary criticism and historical analysis, the commentary discusses philological and stylistic matters. While the treatment of philological issues is not Littlewood's principal focus, the discussion of literary and historical questions makes her commentary more useful for the type of reader that is increasingly likely to consult it in the years ahead. Littlewood's commentary therefore continues the laudable trend evident in recent Oxford Flavian commentaries of focussing on both literary and philological issues. As in her commentary on *Punica* 7, Littlewood's literary approach reveals a heightened appreciation of Silius Italicus as a poet and therefore surpasses the standard commentary that is devoted mainly to philological and textual issues. Littlewood's commentary on *Punica* 10 will be utilized by all serious scholars and students of the epic.<sup>29</sup>

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